

Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education

Task Force Report

January 17, 2014

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education
convened and supported by the members of the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Introduction

School districts in Massachusetts have earned and maintained recognition as leaders in education across the nation. This achievement reflects the dedication of stakeholders who support the educational progress of all children; however, there is evidence that some children have not yet realized the goal of educational proficiency. As a result of careful study, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) acknowledges that there is a need to focus more diligently upon the academic progress of children of color, those who are poor, and those who do not speak English as their primary language so that educational results are equalized regardless of class, race, or the language of the home. Most recently, through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility (ESEA) waiver, the ESE has established an aggressive yet attainable goal of cutting student proficiency gaps in half by 2017¹. To this end, the Commonwealth is engaged in several reform efforts which include, but are not limited to, the introduction and implementation of the new statewide educator evaluation system, the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English and mathematics to the Common Core State Standards, and a defined approach for turning around the lowest performing schools and districts² to support the minimal goal of the attainment of proficiency for all students.

As the ESE works towards this goal, student populations in schools in the Commonwealth are more diverse than in the past³, and ESE acknowledges that a particular knowledge base and skill set are necessary to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Therefore, the capacity of educators and school leaders to effectively promote academic and social success for all students will rest upon their ability to work with and respond positively to the academic and social needs of a diverse student population.

The Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education (MADE) task force has compiled a set of recommendations to support the ESE in reaching two specific targets around diversity:

1. Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce to reflect the population of the Commonwealth and provide the academic and cultural competency supports necessary for all educators to realize academic success with all student populations
2. Decrease the disproportionate –number of suspensions for students of color

These targets are aimed to strategically support the State's educators to achieve the ambitious 2017 goal outlined in the ESEA waiver to reduce the achievement gap by half.

¹ Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (2010). *A Roadmap to Closing the Proficiency Gap*: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/news/0410PGRoadmap.pdf>

² Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012). *ESEA Flexibility Request*.

³ US Census Bureau, 2008 Press Release accessed September 30, 2012: <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html>

Background for MADE

In the Massachusetts 2010 Race to the Top application, the ESE promised to convene a diversity summit which would take place in the Fall of 2010; the goal of this conference was to convene educators to discuss the merits of the recruitment and retention of a diverse and culturally proficient educator workforce and to submit recommendations to ESE. After careful study, ESE realized that it might be unrealistic to expect lasting results from one conference and submitted a change request to the United States Department of Education (US ED) to develop a task force of culturally competent experts to provide advice to ESE in its efforts to decrease the suspension rates for students who are involved in non-violent offenses and to increase diversity within the educator workforce. Through the implementation of these goals, it is hoped that all students, regardless of race or class, will be taught by educators who concurrently reflect the diversity of Massachusetts and value the academic and success of all students. If effective education is coupled with decreased out of school time, the result should be increased academic achievement and social inclusion. The US ED accepted the change from the provision of a Diversity Summit to a task force dedicated to virtual, systemic change with the understanding that the work of the task force would not replace the summit, but that the advice, suggestions and recommendations of the task force would allow ESE to more effectively meet the desired outcome to provide the supports needed to recruit, retain and promote a diverse workforce in schools throughout the Commonwealth and to decrease out-of-school time for all students, and particularly those who have experienced opportunity gaps.

ESE identified members to be a part of the Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education (“MADE”) in April 2013. The committee convened six times between June 27, 2013 and November 22, 2013. The membership of the committee is as follows:

Joanne Allen-Willoughby, METCO Director, Needham Public Schools
Rachel Bowen Coblyn, Assistant Director, Human Resources, Amherst Regional Public Schools
Michele Brooks, Assistant Superintendent, Family/Student Engagement, Boston Public Schools
Dione Christy, Ph.D. Senior Director, Boston Public Schools
Ceronne Daly, Director of Diversity Programs, Boston Public Schools
Stacey DeBoise Luster, Human Resources Director, Worcester Public Schools
Julie Hackett, Superintendent of Schools, Taunton Public Schools
Gary L. Gilardi, Education Policy Specialist, Massachusetts Teacher Association
Tom Gosnell, President, American Federation of Teachers
John Jackson, President and CEO, Schott Foundation for Public Education
Nealon Jaynes-Lewis, Co-Chairperson, Racial Imbalance Advisory Council
Glenn Koocher, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Committees
James Martin-Rehrmann, Professor of Education, Westfield State University
Velda McRae Yates, Interim Deputy Director, Commonwealth Compact
Chris McGrath, Director of Operations, Massachusetts Association School Superintendents
Wilma Ortiz, Assistant Professor, 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Westfield State University
Elizabeth Shevlin Tripathi, Education Policy Specialist, Massachusetts Teacher Association
Ray Shurtleff, Lecturer, University of Massachusetts Boston, Department of Leadership in Education, College of Education and Human Development
Ron Walker, Executive Director, Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color
Dr. Kahris White-McLaughlin, Affirmative Action Officer, Cambridge Public Schools

ESE Supporting Staff

Simone Lynch, EPPL Co-Assistant Director, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Cynthia L. Mompoin, Equitable Distribution Specialist, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Anna O'Connor, Policy Analyst, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Heather Peske, Associate Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Intended Goals of MADE

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has convened the task force, Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education (MADE), to assist in determining effective and/or promising practices that will strategically support schools as we examine suspension practices and support districts in building a diverse and culturally proficient educator workforce.

The charge of the task force is to serve in the capacity of expert advisors and provide actionable recommendations that will:

1. Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce
2. Decrease in the disproportionate use of suspensions across the state

Recommendations from MADE

While the charge presented to the task force focuses on educators and students of color, it is the position of MADE that the strategies and promising practices highlighted shall benefit all students and educators. It is also the belief of this group that implementing these key actions will increase the diversity of the educator workforce to one that more accurately reflects the student population and, in turn, reduce proficiency gaps.

The committee submits the following actionable recommendations for consideration by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. The recommendations are organized into two sections: (1) recommendations for diversifying the educator workforce; and (2) recommendations for developing the cultural proficiency of the educator workforce. We have also included an appendix containing full descriptions of each recommendation and the biographies of the task force members who actively contributed to the recommendations set forth.

Recommendations for diversifying the educator workforce

1. **Design opportunities to attract highly talented students of color to the teaching profession.** Use the variety of teacher pipelines to create customized cohorts of teachers (e.g. males of color, students interested in STEM, career changers, multi-lingual educators, etc.). In particular, develop a model for a local/community-based pipeline, and encourage districts to create a variety of entry points into the educator pipeline including (but not limited to) middle school, high school, paraprofessionals, parents and/or community members vested in public education. Innovative partnerships should be fostered among community organizations, institutions of higher education, and school districts to maximize the benefits of this initiative. This strategy enables districts to recruit culturally and linguistically diverse candidates by accessing their entire school community.
2. **Expand the acceptable out-of state educator experience requirements for Initial licenses from three full years of employment under the license sought to include educator license candidates who have successfully completed a National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) or Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accredited educator preparation program and who hold a comparable educator license.**
3. **Increase the transparency and accountability of preparation program efforts to diversify their enrollment and program completers by requiring approved programs to report on the recruitment, retention, and program completion of its students.** The Department should consider producing a report of educator preparation programs. ESE should collect and publicize additional data sets that would demonstrate the recruiting and retention of diverse educator candidates. Enrollment data should be linked to data around program completers. There should also be an opportunity for annual discussion amongst preparation programs and the Department with a goal of highlighting successful or promising practices.
4. **State will respond to MTEL Pass Rate Task Force Report.** We request that ESE review the technical recommendations of the 2008 MTEL Pass Rate Task Force report, especially those

recommendations that are designed to reduce the disparities in pass rates on MTEL tests with respect to race/ethnicity and first language. We also request that ESE follow up with the test vendor and require a comprehensive report with respect to these recommendations.

5. Develop a systemic search process protocol.

School leaders and school committees must be knowledgeable about cross cultural practices, and understand the importance of recruiting and retaining educators of color. These leaders must create and sustain the conditions necessary to retain educators of color in their school systems. Prospective superintendents and school administrators must also have a tool to gauge a school system's professional culture and understanding of cultural proficiency on a continuum of learning.

1.) To that end, the State, in collaboration with MASS and MASC and other organizations, will develop a training program to improve cultural proficiency to create and sustain an inclusive environment for candidates and potential employees whose cultural backgrounds offer differing perspectives of the school community involved.

2.) Cultural competency assessments should be conducted across the school system to determine the conditions and culture of the district and community. This will provide school leadership with the opportunity to prioritize areas for training and will give ESE the opportunity to encourage the change of community mindsets.

School districts in conjunction with local community organizations and the school committee should establish search committees that have been trained on legal considerations, practices, behavioral interviewing questions to promote standardization of process, probing techniques, and candidate selection. A model guideline should be established with the goal of increasing the number of educators of color in the workforce.

Recommendations for developing the cultural proficiency of the educator workforce

6. **Create a system for monitoring student exclusion data at the state level.** ESE internal staff will monitor the full data set of student suspension and retention regardless of the size of the cohort and for all student groups. Suspension data from all schools will be monitored, and districts with high suspension rates will receive supports to decrease non-violent suspension rates. ESE will respond with commendations, recommendations, suggestions, and identification of supports.
7. **Create and implement strategies to support transition points for students.** The new reality of public schooling is changing rapidly. In a few short years, students of color will be the majority population in U.S. public schools. In order to remain competitive nationally and internationally, it is imperative that Massachusetts lead the way in supporting the academic, social, emotional and cultural growth of all students. Imperative to their development, students need to be educated to understand the fullness of “who they are”, particularly students of color. Supports need to be in place that promote a sense of self efficacy and provide these students with another “common core,” – a common core that enables them to understand the critical importance of knowing in a deep and intimate way “who they are” and why knowledge of their culture and identity are inextricably bound to their hopes, dreams, aspirations and success.
8. **Create and establish a Cultural Responsive Education (CRE) Academy for Educators at all levels with a requirement that educator preparation programs demonstrate effective cultural proficiency training for all approved Initial licensure programs for teachers and administrators.** The CRE Academy will focus on building an in-depth understanding around the critical importance of CRE within all school-based settings and how they impact policies, procedures, and practices. There needs to be a culturally responsive mindset and commitment developed amongst our leadership, and specific courses should be offered to policy-makers. Awareness of what it means to be culturally proficient needs to be raised among all educator stakeholders, followed by professional development. Professional development should be made available for all school-based and district staff, as well as school committee members. A commitment to provide CRE training will help to develop a culturally responsive mindset among all education stakeholders. Candidates in approved programs for Initial licensure should complete training and field experiences that increase their understanding of cultural proficiency, family and community engagement and diversity in education. An optional endorsement to educators’ licenses should be made available to those who already hold an Initial or Professional license and complete additional professional development in culturally responsive education and family and community engagement.
9. **Create a second form of Commendation School Status to recognize that school culture plays a powerful role in student achievement.** The ESE has created “Commendation School Status” to recognize school systems for outstanding academic performance as measured by a school’s Level I status and growth scores. Educators and school leaders are motivated by this positive incentive that focuses on the academic aspects of education. For schools and districts to become more cross-culturally proficient, a similar level of motivation and commitment is needed. Cultural proficiency is a powerful variable in student and staff success, and schools and districts that invest in helping people from diverse backgrounds work together may be

better equipped to recruit and retain educators of color. The purpose of this recommendation is to encourage school and/or district leaders who are invested in improving cultural proficiency to demonstrate their effectiveness with a set of standards adopted by the ESE, many of which are identified in the recommendations set forth in this report (see Full Description of Recommendations for details). A self-study process and site visit similar to that used in accreditation programs will be used, and school and/or district leaders will have an opportunity to be recognized for outstanding strategies and best practices being implemented in their school/district, or they might go through the process to learn more about how to improve their knowledge and understanding.

10. Develop a guide for alternative practices to zero tolerance and out of school suspensions.

It is difficult to change long-standing disciplinary practices in schools, and given the disproportionate number of out-of-school suspensions for students of color in Massachusetts, there is an urgent need to rethink current policies and practices. A bold approach is needed to encourage school leaders to examine new approaches to discipline. We recommend that the ESE, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), and the Massachusetts Opportunity to Learn (MOTL) produce a guide for alternative practices to zero tolerance including policies, and procedures that promote positive and restorative behavior. To encourage active use and consideration of positive behavioral management, ESE, in collaboration with the local school districts and school committees, will place a moratorium on all non-violent and non-drug related out of school suspensions. The moratorium will be instituted on a date and time certain but within a period of no less than one year to allow each locality time and space to align and implement supports for students and teachers.

Appendix

1. Full Description of Task Force Recommendations (see attached document)
2. Model Educator Evaluation Rubric for Teachers and Administrators
(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/rubrics/>)
3. Data Sets
 - a. Diversity of educator workforce in Massachusetts
(http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/teacherbyracegender.aspx)
 - b. Diversity educator preparation programs
(http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/epppcandidateenrollment.aspx)
 - c. Diversity of Massachusetts public school student population
(http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/enrollmentbyracegender.aspx)
 - d. Data on suspensions of students (see attached document)
4. [Biography of Task Force Members](#)